
U.S. Representative

John Spratt

South Carolina # 5th District

News Release

December 21, 2001, For Immediate Release

Contact: Chuck Fant, 202-225-5501

Spratt Says Cherokee Finishing Workers Eligible for Assistance

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. John Spratt (S-SC) announced today that the U.S. Department of Labor has certified all employees of the Cherokee Finishing Plant of Spartan International as eligible for worker adjustment assistance under the Trade Act of 1974. The determination is the result of a petition filed on July 2, 2001 on behalf of the workers at the Gaffney plant.

“Trade Act programs are available to people who have become unemployed as a result of increased imports,” said Spratt. “The goal is to help laid-off workers get back to work with a suitable job as quickly as possible.”

Upon receiving Spartan International’s petition for assistance, the Department of Labor surveyed the major customers of Cherokee Finishing regarding their purchases of decorative fabric. According to the Department, the surveys revealed “significant customer imports of decorative fabric.” The “increases of imports of articles like or directly competitive with printed fabric, finished fabric, blankets and spreads, and knitted shirts contributed importantly to the declines in sales or production and to the total or partial separation of workers,” the certification announcement said.

“This certification,” said Spratt, “lets workers apply for a variety of important benefits, ranging from extended training benefits to job search assistance and income support payments that apply after unemployment insurance runs out.” He added, “These workers first tried to qualify for NAFTA trade benefits, but because the firm’s troubles were tied to Asian imports rather than imports from Canada or Mexico, they were not eligible for the NAFTA benefits. This new certification is good news for the former employees of Cherokee Finishing,” said Spratt, “because the benefits are more substantial.”

To qualify for training opportunities, workers must meet the following six criteria:

1. No suitable employment is available for the worker. Suitable employment is defined as work of equal or higher skill level, paying not less than 80 percent of the worker’s average weekly wage, not including self-employment or employment as an independent contractor.
2. The worker would benefit from training that would provide the necessary skills to gain employment and would be within the worker’s abilities to complete.

3. Reasonable expectations of employment would follow training.
4. Training is reasonably available from either public or private providers.
5. The worker has the appropriate educational background, work experience and financial resources to complete the training.
6. Training is appropriate for the worker and available at a reasonable cost.

Spratt said more information is available to affected workers from South Carolina's Trade Adjustment Assistance Coordinator, Maria Anderson, of the Employment Security Commission, P.O. Box 1406, Columbia, SC 20202, (803) 737-3096. The Department of Labor also recommends the web site, www.servicelocator.org.

#